Teaching Methods Preferred by Part-Time Tertiary Students in Ghana

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Abstract

Teaching methods to a large extent determine learning outcomes as far as the teaching-learning transaction is concerned. Teaching methods include lectures, discussions and tutorials. This study examines the teaching methods available to part-time students and what they prefer. The study used descriptive statistics and narrative analysis. Even though the lecture method dominates part-time study, the discussion method is the most preferred method followed by the lecture method. Students are also of the view that print with study guides facilitates learning. There is also overwhelming supports for the use of the internet were it readily available.

Key Words: Part-Time Students, Teaching methods, Tertiary Students, Distance Learning and Facilitations Styles

Introduction

The essence of teaching is to promote learning. The teacher's role, therefore, is to facilitate the learner's understanding of what is being taught. To achieve this, certain conditions must be met. These include a relationship between the teacher and learner and their ability to communicate with one another. A learning environment which activates and stimulates communication and understanding becomes paramount (CIMAS/ICA, 1984).

Fry, Medsker and Bonner (1996:56) are of the view that when selecting methods of teaching for adults one must take into consideration "adult learning theory, which emphasises involvement, interaction, facilitation and participation". This is based on the popular maxim that the best way to learn is through practice. Naylor (1996), endorses this view by stating that studies have shown that adults learn best by doing. CIMAS/ICA (1984:3) succinctly quotes the following old adage:

> What we **hear** we **FORGET**;
> What we **see** we **REMEMBER**;
> What we **do** we **UNDERSTAND**?

This study is meant to investigate the types of teaching methods used in part-time study in Accra by tutors at Accra Workers College, SAS Accountancy Centre, Centre for Business Studies, and the Certified Chartered Accountants Students Society in Ghana. Likewise teaching methods students prefer and why in order to help design programmes as well as teaching/learning strategies that will enhance part-time students' learning at a distance.

Literature Review

Stephens (1989) and Stephens (1996:536) have grouped learning methods into three. These are expository methods, direction methods and discovery methods. Expository methods refer to methods like lecture, talk with group participation and demonstration in which the content of what is to be learnt is presented to the learner. Direction methods, on the other hand, refer to a method where the content of what is to be taught is so structured that learning outcomes are predetermined. For example, discussion methods, skill practice, role-play, group tasks and activities. With discovery methods, the learner explores issues to be learnt usually through self-direction, simulation and gaming.

At another level, Jarvis (1995) also groups teaching methods into three viz. didactic, Socratic and facilitative. The didactic method is a teacher-centred approach to learning. Here detailed information on knowledge to be learned is presented to learners. This approach is popular in traditional classrooms. With the Socratic approach, however, teachers help students to deduce information through questions and arrive at conclusions. In facilitative teaching, the teacher facilitates the learning process but is not in control of the end results.

According to Stephens (1996), Knowles (1980) is of the view that adult teaching should be learner-centred rather than teacher-centred. The teacher should be a facilitator and one of the resources among several. Both teacher and learner must work in partnership. Finally, methods of learning must be mainly self-directed and rely mostly on the learner's experience.

Teachers of adults have a wide range of teaching methods to choose from in the teaching/learning situation. Some of these are the lecture method, discussion method, skill practice, role-play, case study, debates and tutorials (Jarvis 1995; Apel and Camozzi 1996; CIMAS/ICA 1984; Stephens 1996, Naylor 1996; Fry et al 1996).

Fry, Medsker and Bonner (1996:56) have emphasised the need for teaching methods to fit "specific content, objectives, audience and personal preferences". Similarly, Boshier (1989:151) opines that teachers could use teaching methods "appropriate to the type of outcome sought". He advocates the use of experiential methods like group discussions, case study, structured exercise, simulation and role-play to promote intellectual and cognitive attitudes in learners.

Fry, Medsker and Bonner (1996) contend that student learning is enhanced when their interest is stimulated by using different teaching methods during a teaching session. This is because it will satisfy different groups of students. According to Apel and Camozzi (1996), Jarvis (1995), Stephens (1996), a combination of teaching methods enhances student learning instead of depending on just one or two.

Many authors like Naylor (1996), Stephens (1996); Fry, Medsker and Bonner (1996) are of the view that adult learners learn best when they are involved in the teaching learning process. Participatory methods like the discussion method, case study, demonstrations are very important. Of these, Collins, Greeno and Resnick (1996) have described the discussion method as possibly the most powerful medium for learning. This is because students are actively involved in the teaching/learning process, which subsequently stimulates interest.

Despite this observation, the lecture method is the most popular method used in adult education (Stephens, 1996; Jarvis, 1995). Stephens (1996) maintains that though the lecture method does not stimulate much, especially when no allowance is made for discussion after the lecture session, it is by no means a cheap method as is often perceived.

The lecture method plays an important role when information and facts are conveyed in an orderly manner that will facilitate understanding in the teaching of subjects like accounting and mathematics. It is also useful in situations where students cannot read materials for themselves (CIMAS/ICA 1984; Fry et al 1995). Probably this explains why Naylor (1996); Stephens (1996); and Jarvis (1995) assert that it is useful in the face of limited resources.

Fry et al (1996) argue that students with technical backgrounds may be used to passive learning and feel comfortable with it. For this reason, they may prefer the lecture method to other teaching methods that would involve active participation and enhance learning in the process. Jarvis (1995) argues that some students may like the lecture method because they are passive learners while others may prefer it simply because it would enable them to mask their lack of understanding. In a similar vein, some teachers prefer the lecture method because it gives them control over the class thus covering up for their limited knowledge.

Again, with the lecture method, the teacher controls the pace and structure of teaching and can cover a lot of grounds faster (Fry, Medsker and Bonner 1996). Jarvis (1995), however, opines that one disadvantage of the lecture method is that lecture notes may not be well prepared nor given by a qualified person. Beard (1976:101) and Legge (1971), as cited in Jarvis (1995), also believe that lectures may be economical when teaching many students at the same time and ensuring that the whole syllabus is covered. Bligh (1971:13), cited in Jarvis (1995), however, maintains that there is no point in covering the whole syllabus at the expense of students' learning especially when there is proof that there is a variation in concentration as a lecture progresses.

Further, if learners do not get the opportunity to ask questions, their "learning needs" may not be satisfied. Besides, lecture notes may be too much for a given session and thereby hinder students' learning. Finally, the lecture method may not provide sufficient opportunity for the adult student to remember and internalise all the ideas presented. Learners may also not get the opportunity to reflect upon the knowledge transmitted after a lecture has been presented. It is therefore not a good method in facilitating students' thinking and a change in students' attitudes (Jarvis, 1995). He cautions that the method must be used sparingly.

Titmus (1989) contends that the role of the traditional teacher has been one of a dominant prescriber of what to learn, where to learn, when to learn and with what methods. It is, however, evident that this belief no longer holds sway. Contract learning in which students and teachers are in partnership to determine what work to do and when has become popular in some forms of adult education (Jarvis, 1995). Contract learning also stresses interaction between the tutor and learner (Holmberg, 1995).

Besides, print, audio and video materials which are readily available have pushed the hitherto view of the teacher as the sole source of knowledge into the background (Titmus, 1989). This confirms the view that the teacher is one of several resources and a facilitator who helps the student to gain access to knowledge through other sources (Stephens, 1996; Titmus, 1989).

Titmus (1989) further argues that adult developmental stages with its attendant challenges like socio-economic responsibilities and status has affected teaching/learning methods and environments thus giving more credence to open and distance learning. This ties in with Waniewicz's (1975:4) observations that "working adults need new and a greater variety of educational services and opportunities". He further states that these "newly required services would have to take into account, to a greater degree than existing services, people's constraints in time, in geographic location, in ability to leave home, in ability to travel". Such educational opportunities must meet the needs of both the middle-aged and youngest adult.

Waniewicz (1975:2) further underscores "the role of the media, in particular, the mass media in meeting those needs of part-time learners which are not being met by the existing opportunities and facilities". He therefore advocates the need for diverse teaching and learning situations that would promote sequential and structured learning. One cannot, therefore, help but agree with Perraton (2000) who suggests the need to research into the integration of distance education methods with traditional ones and the adoption of the most suitable to cater for educational objectives.

Methodology

For this study of teaching methods preferred by part-time students in Ghana,   data were collected from adult part-time students in four institutions. These include Accra Workers' College where students were pursuing Academic courses. The others are: and SAS Accountancy Centre, Centre for Business Studies, and the Certified Chartered Accountants Students Society in Ghana whose students were pursuing professional courses in Accra.

A population of 612 comprising 419 from Accra Workers' College, 103 from SAS Accountancy Centre, 40 from the Centre for Business Studies and 50 from the Chartered Accountants Students Society in Ghana were surveyed. Total samples of 240 questionnaires were sent to respondents and 161 representing a response rate of 67% was realised. Four uncompleted questionnaires were rejected.

The survey research design was used to solicit responses from the students. All the students were studying part-time at the centres selected. The questionnaire was the instrument used. It sought to find out the teaching methods predominantly used in class, teaching methods preferred by students as well as learning materials students felt would enhance their learning. It also tried to find out whether students would be interested in using new media were they available.

Findings

Teaching Methods Used In Class

Teaching methods are meant to be learner centred and facilitate the teaching/learning process. So the study tried to find out the type of teaching methods used in teaching the two groups. The results are shown in Table 1:1

Table 1.1:Teaching Methods Mostly Used in Class

Teaching Method Used	Professional	Academic	Both
	Yes %	Yes %	Yes %
Lecture	77.5	98.8	88.2
Discussion	17.5	8.6	13.0
Tutorial	17.5	28.4	23.0
Case study	10.0	4.9	7.5
Skill practice	8.8	2.5	5.6

As indicated in table 1.1 the lecture method was the most widely used in part-time study as indicated by 77.5% of those enrolled in professional courses and 98.8% of students enrolled in academic courses.

The tutorial was the second most adopted method for students studying academic courses, while both discussion and tutorials were often used in professional study.

This is inconsistent with "adult learning theory which emphasises involvement, interaction, facilitation and participation" (Fry, Medsker and Bonner, 1996:56). It also does not take into consideration the fact that adult teaching should be learner-centred rather than teacher-centred (Naylor, 1996; Fry, Medsker and Bonner, 1996; Stephens, 1996; Jarvis, 1995). But why should the lecture method, which under normal circumstances should be used sparingly, be the most popular method used?

This could be due to inadequate reading materials for students (Onumah, 1997). It could also be due to the fact that lecturers had to deal with large classes as well as wide syllabuses for which the lecture method is economical (Legge, 1971 as cited in Jarvis, 1995). This may explain why Naylor (1996), Stephens (1996) and Jarvis (1995) maintain that the lecture method is useful in the face of limited resources. The popularity of the use of the lecture method could also be due to the fact that it plays an important role when information and facts are conveyed in an orderly manner that facilitates understanding in teaching of subjects like Accounting and Mathematics (Fry et al 1995; CIMAS/ICA, 1984; Naylor 1996; Jarvis 1995). For these reasons it may be useful for students offering professional courses in areas like Accounting. Students offering academic courses may also benefit from the lecture method since a lot of information is got.

Jarvis (1995), however, cautions against the excessive use of the lecture method since it is "as effective as any other method of transmitting information, but not more effective" (p. 117).

Teaching Methods Preferred

Part-time students may prefer one teaching method to another. The study thus sought to find out what teaching method students preferred. Results are presented in Table 1. 2.

Table 1.2:Teaching Methods Preferred

Issues	Professional	Academic	Both
	Yes %	Yes %	Yes %
Lecture	62.5	74.1	68.3
Discussion	61.3	79.0	70.2
Tutorial	41.3	72.8	57.1
Case study	27.5	18.5	23.0
Skill practice	23.8	4.9	14.3
Role play	3.8	2.5	3.1
Demonstration	27.5	18.5	23.0
Simulation	3.8	3.7	3.7
Self-study materials	30.0	34.6	32.3

For part-time study, the data shows that the majority of students (70.2%) preferred the discussion method followed by the lecture method. Table 1.2 shows that the majority (62.5%) of students enrolled in professional courses preferred the lecture method of teaching followed by the discussion method (61.3%) and tutorials (41.3%). Students enrolled in academic courses, however, preferred the discussion method (79.0%) followed by the lecture method (74.1%) and tutorials (72.8%).

The fact that the majority of students offering professional courses preferred the lecture method over other methods of teaching could be linked to the argument that students with technical backgrounds may be used to passive learning and feel comfortable with it than with methods that would involve active participation and enhance learning in the process (Fry et al, 1996). Jarvis (1995) is of the opinion that apart from some students being passive learners, others may prefer the lecture method simply to mask their own lack of understanding. However, the students' preference for the lecture method could mean that they did not have adequate study materials of their own as well as time for personal research.

Students offering academic courses as well as the totality of part-time students' preference for the discussion method of teaching explain the view that the discussion method is possibly the most powerful medium for learning (Collins, Greeno and Resnick, 1996). This is because students are actively involved in the teaching and learning process. The fact that students in part-time studies least preferred role play, simulation and in the case of students offering academic courses skill practice, relate to their limited usage in class (Collins, Greeno and Resnick, 1996).

Reasons for Students' Preference for Some Teaching Methods over Others

Students expressed several reasons for preferring one teaching method to others. Some of the teaching methods mentioned were the lecture method, discussion, tutorials and the use of self-study materials.

Lecture Method

Students were of the view that the lecture method enabled lecturers to complete the syllabi on time taking into consideration the limited time of part-time learners. In addition, it gave one extensive information on subjects taught and in the process gave students extensive knowledge and the opportunity to explore other areas of the subject. It also facilitated understanding and research. The following are some opinions expressed by students.

"The lecture method enables the lecturer to complete the academic calendar". Female, 48-52 age group.
Academic
"The lecture method enables the lecturer to cover enough grounds". Female, 38-42 age group, Academic
"It creates room for personal research". Male, 28-32 age group, Professional
"The lecture method helps me to understand most of the lessons I could not understand in the text books".
Female, 23-27 age group, Academic

Other sentiments expressed by the students concerning the lecture method were its handiness in the absence of adequate reading materials, its fast-paced nature and the fact that it conserved time. Besides, it exposed students to lecturers' teaching styles and gave one a taste of learning in a tertiary institution. Again, it was useful when a new subject was being introduced.

"It is useful because there are not enough reading materials in the library". Male, 33-37 age group, Academic
"Lecturing goes faster and conserves time. It gives the lecturer much control". Female, 28-32 age group,
Professional
"It helps me know the teaching styles of lecturers. Male, 23-27 age group, Academic
"The lecture method exposes students to real academic work". Female, 18-22 age group, Academic
"It introduces you to a topic and opens your mind up to research". Male 28-32 age group, Professional.
"Lectures help introduce students to the content of a particular course". Male, 28-32 age group, Academic

Discussion Method

Many students found this method of teaching and learning very useful. Students' opinions included the participatory nature of discussions, which facilitated understanding and enhanced learning. The following are some of students' views.

"It gives one ample time to interact with lecturers". Male, 48-52 age group, Professional
"It helps tap divergent views and stimulates learning". Male, 28-32 age group, Academic
"Two heads are better than one as such contributions from several people on a topic bring in a variety of points which one person might not have". Female, 43-47 age group, Academic
"It involves and enhances students' participation". Male, 33-37 age group, Professional
"It facilitates better understanding". Female, 28-32 age group, Academic
"Students involvement/participation through discussions encourage students' preparation (reading/research) before classes and therefore increases students' confidence levels". Male, 48-52 age group, Professional

Other opinions expressed on the discussion method were that it enhanced remembrance, made learning interesting and lively and came in handy where there was a shortage of relevant reading materials and also saved time.

"It creates the environment for me to have a retentive memory when studying". Female, 43-47 age group, Professional

"Because I work full-time, I get tired by close of work so lectures become boring. A discussion gets students more involved and makes learning livelier". Female, 23-27 age group, Professional

"It is useful because of inadequate reading materials in the library and limited time". Female, 28-32 age group, Academic

"Due to the rather limited time at my disposal, discussions in class go a long way in helping me assimilate what is taught easily. I also tend to remember topics discussed better". Male, 38-42 age group, Professional

"It assists in private studies at home". Male, 28-32 age group, Professional

Tutorials

Some students also chose tutorials for a number of reasons. The main reason was that it facilitated understanding of what was taught. Other views shared by respondents include the following:

"It enables students learn techniques of answering questions". Male, 38-42 age group, Professional

"It affords me the opportunity to ask more questions and participate actively in the discussion". Male, 28-32 age group, Academic

"There is the chance to interact more with lecturers". Male, 38-42 age group, Professional

"It enables we the shy ones to contribute during tutorials". Male, 23-27 age group, Academic

Study Materials

On self-study materials with occasional face-to-face, students were of the view that it covered the whole syllabi and promoted time management. They also expressed the following sentiments.

"It enables you to study at your own pace and convenience and reduces the time and money spent on travelling in order to attend classes, Female, 33-37 age group, Academic

"Because of limited time I find self-study materials necessary". Male, 48-52 age group, Professional

"With self-study materials you are able to go at your own pace and identify areas you are not comfortable with to be discussed at the occasional face-to-face teaching". Female, 33-37 age group, Academic

Learning Materials That Will Facilitate Learning

Students' learning is enhanced when a media mix is used in the teaching and learning process as indicated in table 1.3.

Table 1.3:Learning Materials that Facilitate Learning

Issues	Professional Yes %	Academic Yes %	Both Yes %
Print with study guides	78.8	87.7	83.2
Audio cassettes with study guides	37.5	45.7	41.6
Video cassettes with study guides	56.3	43.2	49.7
Listening to radio broadcasts on syllabus at specific times	13.8	19.8	16.8
Viewing TV programmes on syllabus at specific times	22.5	30.9	26.7
Satellite broadcasts	17.5	27.2	22.4

Table 1.3 shows that print with study guides were the media most part-time students (83.2%) believed would facilitate their learning.

It is interesting to note that the least selected media was radio. Only 13.8%, 19.8% and 16.8% respectively selected that medium. This is however surprising since radio is about the cheapest. However, one must not lose sight of the fact that being part-time learners their main problem would probably be finding time to listen during the day as workers and at night while in school. This may probably account for the reason why 56.3% of students offering professional courses opted for video cassettes while 45.7% of students pursuing academic courses opted for audio cassettes as their second option even though video cassettes are relatively more expensive.

However, video cassettes would be easily accessible to students and also more convenient than the live broadcasts. It is also important to note that video cassettes give both sound and pictures to viewers and facilitate learning better.

Accessibility of Courses via the Internet

The information age with its attendant new media had not been lost to Ghanaian part-time students, even if they did not have immediate access to it. The majority of part-time students (90%) made up of (96.3%) enrolled in professional courses and 83.9% enrolled in academic courses would like to study via the internet if they had access to it. This view reflects the trend reported by Brown (1996) regarding the use of new media by distance learners in the United Stated of America. According to him, "fewer colleges and universities (7%) offer print-based correspondence courses, with technology-based distance education having overtaken print-based as the medium of choice by students in most higher education institutions" (p. 70). The fact, however, still remains that in selecting media, availability, (Holmberg, 1995) and access to the medium (Cavanagh, 1997) are essential to consider since sophisticated or new technologies do not necessarily make better alternatives to the basic ones (Bates, 1990; Cavanagh, 1997). To these may be added costs, convenience, background of students and the nature of the subjects (Perraton, 1991; Dhanarajan, 1992).

On the issue of learning materials that would facilitate learning, print with study guide was the choice of part-time students. The print media may be the choice of most students because it is easy to understand, easy to compare notes and makes referencing easy. Part-time students showed an overwhelming support for the use of the internet were it available. At least, students' interest in the use of the internet indicated that they were aware of new media which could facilitate learning even though they did not have access to it.

Implications for Distance Education

In line with adult learning theory, and in view of the fact that part-time students preferred the discussion method of teaching, which involves students' active participation in the teaching/learning process, distance education tutors should as much as possible make use of the discussion method during tutorials. In addition, the course design should deal with students' desire for discussions.

Part-time students' interest in the discussion method is shared by Rowntree (1990) who admits that active learning is essential in distance education. He is of the view that, rather than organise course in the lecture form,

We should aim to draw responses out of our readers and to get them to learn by doing because students learn better when they have to use ideas than when they have to read about them. To this end, it is essential to develop course materials that will enhance discussions by asking questions to be answered as the course develops (p. 120).

It is therefore important for course developers to spread activities throughout the text instead of relegating them to the end of the text.

Another interactive approach that would benefit learners as they learn independent of tutors and peers is the use of guided didactic conversation as advocated by Holmberg (1995) and based on principles including the following:

- ❖ That feeling of personal relation between the teaching and learning parties promote study pleasure and motivations.
- ❖ Those feelings can be fostered by well-developed self-instructional material and two-way communication at a distance.
- ❖ That messages given and received in conversational forms are comparatively easily understand and remembered (p. 47).

In addition to these, occasional face-to-face interactions with students must not be in a lecture form. Rather, students must raise issues to be discussed. For Beaudion (2004) rightly points out that distance education is learner-centred and with the teacher acting as a facilitator in the learning process, students' dependence on 'teacher direction' p53, would reduce self directed learning.

On the issue of teaching modes that students will prefer, print with study guides was the choice of part-time students. However, programmes can be put on audio and video cassettes to reduce boredom and balance the strengths and weaknesses of each medium so as to sustain students' interest in the programmes.

Conclusion

Most part-time students would have liked to be in control of their learning as exemplified by their preference for the discussion method of teaching, mainly because of its interactive nature even though the lecture method dominated in class. However, it is worth noting that the discussion method goes hand in hand with textbooks, handouts and other learning materials which if not readily available could hinder smooth learning. Also, print with study guides as well as the internet if readily available could facilitate students' learning. It is important therefore for teachers of adult learners to mobilise resources that would help make their teaching as interactive as possible. This also points to the future prospect of using online teaching methodology which is mainly interactive in approach and to which students in the study overwhelmingly subscribe.

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